

Maressa Smith valiantly fights brain tumor

Written by Wauneta Breeze

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Maressa “Reese” Smith, a Wauneta icon for her strength and friendly smile, has fought medical issues since a young age. This evening, Thursday, Oct. 24 friends and family will host a benefit for Reese at the Wauneta American Legion Hall to help defray hospital expenses. (Sheri Hink-Wagner | The Wauneta Breeze)

By Christi Christner

The Wauneta Breeze

Maressa “Reese” Smith has spent her whole life fighting extreme health problems. At the age of four Smith was diagnosed with Leukemia and underwent chemotherapy and radiation. In 2004 she also went through endometria cancer.

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After receiving radiation at the age of four, doctors found a radiation induced tumor in the frontal lobe of her head. The tumor was found to encompass several optical nerves and her carotid artery. Her pituitary gland and shriveled arteries began to shut down from the radiation.

On New Year's Eve in 2009, Smith underwent her first head tumor surgery. The neuro-surgeon removed as much of the tumor as he could without damaging any optical nerves or the carotid artery.

Although most of the tumor had been removed, there was still a part of it in her head. Maressa went through five weeks of radiation, five days a week, to try to reduce the tumor.

In February 2013 when Smith went in for an MRI doctors found that the tumor had been growing and she would need yet another craniotomy surgery. Since Smith's veins and arteries had shriveled due to the recent radiation, doctors first had to put in stints in two arteries in her neck and into her carotid artery on the left side.

On April 8, 2013, Smith, underwent another major surgery. Doctor's went to open the right side of her skull to remove the more persistent growing tumor. At the same time, doctors were able to remove another portion of the tumor, but were forced to cut the nerve that allows Reese to open her right eye as well as another nerve that allows for eye movement on the right side.

If that wasn't enough for Maressa to go through, two days after the major surgery, an air pocket was found on the brain, forcing doctors to go back into surgery and remove a piece of her skull to relieve the pressure. Smith remained in ICU and critical condition for many days.

This courageous and tenacious woman's journey did not end there. In August, Reese's neuro-surgeon called her with more bad news and plans of yet another surgery. On Sept. 11, doctors went in through her nasal passages to perform a six and a half hour surgery to remove more of the tumor.

After all surgeries, Smith has had to stay in ICU and the hospital for long amounts of time. She is now staying with her mother and father, Kenny and Barb Smith.

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Through the many health problems in her life Smith has not given up fighting. "She is very positive and upbeat about her situation and illness. You would never know anything was wrong from her attitude. She is definitely a fighter," Leanne Hunt, a friend of Smith, says.

Benefit to help with medical expenses

This evening, Thursday Oct. 24, 2013, at 5:30 p.m. MT/ 6:30 p.m. CT at the American Legion Hall in Wauneta, there is going to be a free will donation benefit soup supper held to raise money for Smith's hospital expenses.

There will also be T-shirts for sale at the benefit that say, "Root for Reese."

The benefit is being organized by Smith's family and friends, along with many people in the community that work at Valley Bank, Wauneta Crossroads and Wauneta Co-op Oil.

There will be at least four different kinds of soups and desserts served at the Legion.

If anyone in Wauneta wants or needs a ride to and from the benefit the Handibus will be giving free rides. Call (308) 394-5287 or Dallis Breeze, the driver, at (308) 520-9154 for more information.

Benefit organizers say anyone and everyone is invited to come and help defray medical

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expenses as much as they can.

Those close to her say Smith has not only been brave and positive her whole life, but has also been a strong inspiration for many people.